

Walters likely to earn more at White Knoll, according to SC averages

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varying levels of power. Of the state's 85 school districts, 23 possess what is termed "fiscal autonomy." That means districts can raise taxes unfettered if they deem it necessary to compensate for budget short-falls. The increases are usually attached to local hospitality taxes at restaurants and hotels.

Thirty-three other districts have limited authority, with a public referendum or town meeting required in most cases to ratify a tax hike. Only 26 districts have no fiscal authority, meaning the voting public or county councils determine school district budgets.

The differing degree of authority produces an Autobahn-type system with some districts in the fast lane and some in the extreme right slow lane. The often-inequitable system is exemplified by the fact that the highest paid coach in the state makes \$104,000 and the lowest paid coach makes roughly \$26,000.

Socastee's Dixon is a member of the North Carolina High School Athletic Directors Hall of Fame. To him, administrative differences among South Carolina districts have a direct impact on the salaries prep coaches make in the state.

"I think it significantly affects it depending on how much emphasis each of the districts puts on football," said Dixon on South Carolina's localized school systems. "There is probably more emphasis placed on the football and basketball head coach in South Carolina than there is in North Carolina."

North Carolina's school systems could be categorized as fiscally limited. North Carolina school districts are able to dictate supplements for coaches, but salaries are determined by the state pay scale for teachers. Yet, many districts in South Carolina have sway over salaries and supplements, according to a report produced by Clemson University's Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Local revenue

While North Carolina's education system is run from the top down, South Carolina's is seemingly inverted. South Carolina's General Assembly has to submit fiscal impact reports to every school district in the state before passing statewide legislation. This is an exhausting and taxing effort that generally limits the amount of statewide education legislation that is produced by the assembly.

National Education Association figures illustrate South Carolina's preference for relying on local government, especially relative to education. The state reported total education funding of \$7.38 billion in 2007-08. Of that figure, \$3.6 billion came from local government. In the same year, North Carolina's education revenue amounted to \$12.32 billion, with only \$3.06 billion derived from local government.

South Carolina's opposition to a strong central authority seems to be a holdover from the antebellum days of John Calhoun, when the state actually seceded from the Union, helping to spark the Civil War in 1861. Though the Palmetto State is happily a member of the United States now, it still defers to the local government, particularly where education is concerned.

The booster club bump

According to the Strom Thurmond Institute report, the slower flow of state education funding in South Carolina often generates "more use of fund-raising activities by volunteers." For extracurricular activities and athletics, particularly football, that translates into massively mobilized booster clubs, and it's no surprise that Walters spoke glowingly of White Knoll's booster club when queried about his new school's positive characteristics.

White Knoll athletic director Bryan Butz estimated his school's athletic booster club membership numbers near 400. According to the third-year AD, their support is invaluable.

"Our booster club, wow, they do a whole lot for the athletic program," said Butz. "They buy the minor sports, basically everything besides football and basketball, one new set of uniforms for each sport every three years. So that's an expense we don't have to worry about. And that's on a rotation, so every year they're buying a new set of uniforms. They also donate very liberally to the athletic department. There's a set amount that I get from them every year that helps fund the athletics department. And then the coaches are able to go ask them for things. Last year, they bought us a used mower from a golf course so we can cut our athletic fields every other day.

"We couldn't do what we do without our booster club. Or, I suppose we could find a way to do it, but it would not be done nearly as well."

But Butz is careful to point out that his supporters are reined in, unlike some of the powerful collegiate booster clubs that often influence important decisions, or at least attempt to.

"One of the things we do not allow, and I would be very against, is our booster club having anything to do with personnel decisions," said Butz firmly. "They have nothing to do with it. We've made a very conscious decision to stay away from that, and our booster club understands that."

But South Brunswick doesn't have such a sturdy support structure in place.

"We have a booster club, small in number and we would love for it to become larger," said Pennell. "We are very interested in trying to encourage parents to become very involved. It doesn't take a large number to have a good booster club, just commitment."

Butz also points out that almost all extracurricular activities at White Knoll have some type of parent group supporting them. That includes band, ROTC, and academic clubs as well, not just athletics.

Inequity within South Carolina

The differences within South Carolina don't just affect neighboring states. Different local governments make vastly different policies, while the central education department's focus seems to be ensuring the sway of local education boards.

The South Carolina Board of Education instated a policy in 2004 that guarantees, "schools that continually receive recognition are rewarded by exemptions from regulations and statutes." This program was designed to reward achievement but it can also further the gap between schools by continually hawking underachieving schools that might benefit from some legislative leeway.

Fiscal power and flexibility provide two of the greatest differentiators in South Carolina. Exemplary of that gulf, Horry County consists of one district containing nine high schools while Spartanburg County is divided into seven districts, despite having nine high schools just like Horry County.

Dixon relayed a tale that illustrated this issue. In late 2007, Myrtle Beach High School head football coach Scott Earley flirted with the job opening at traditional gridiron powerhouse Spartanburg High School. But he ultimately stayed at the coast, citing his preference to continue living in Myrtle Beach, where he had assembled the Seahawks into a potential state championship contender. Earley was never actually offered the job by Spartanburg, but he did negotiate with the school and they were interested in him as a possible candidate.

The man Spartanburg hired instead, Freddie Brown, ended up with a salary of over \$96,000 to solely coach football. He does not teach at the school, and only had two years of head coaching experience at the time of his hiring. Meanwhile, the next season, Earley led Myrtle Beach High School to Horry County's first state championship title since 1984, justifying the inclination that his Seahawks would be capable of something special.

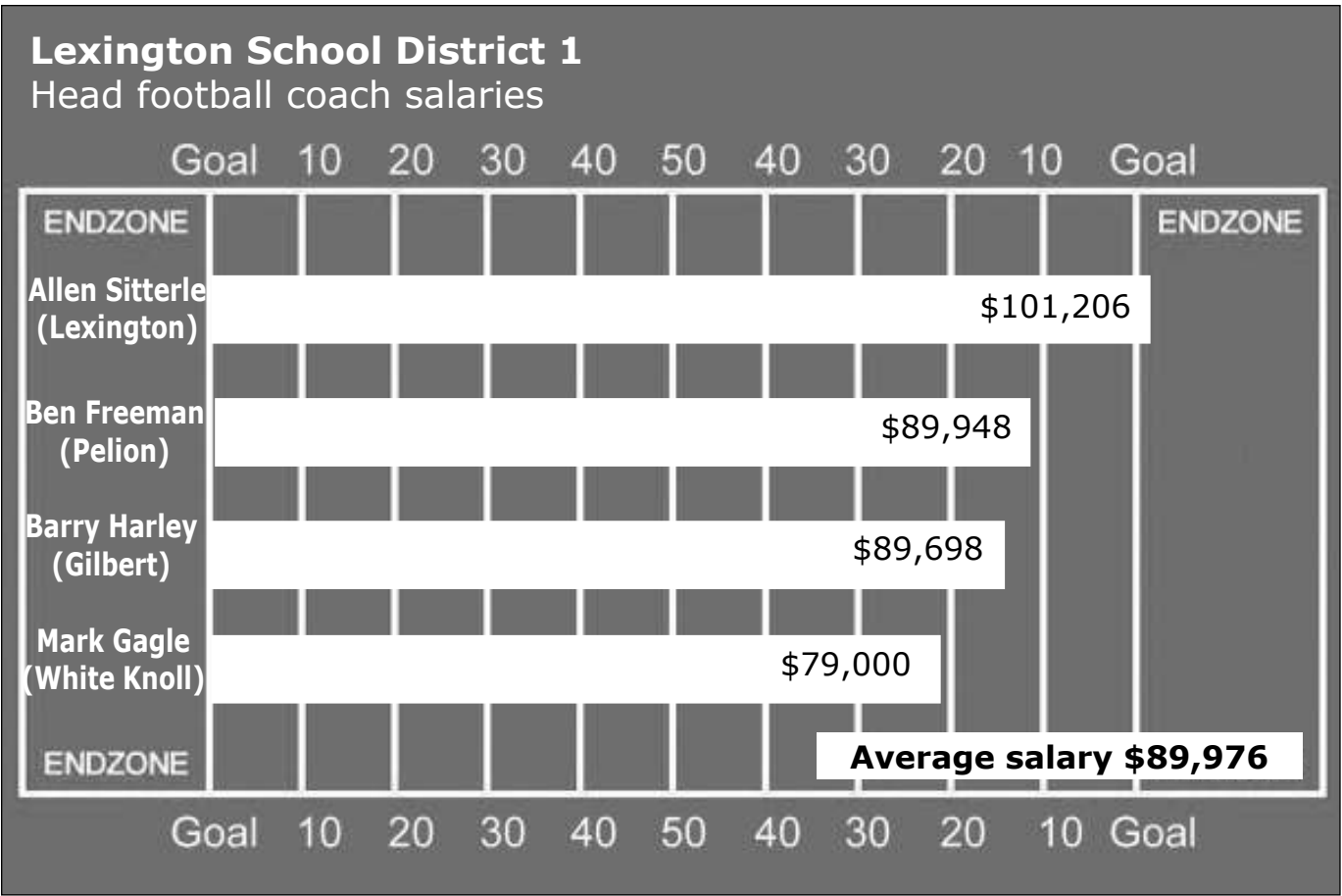
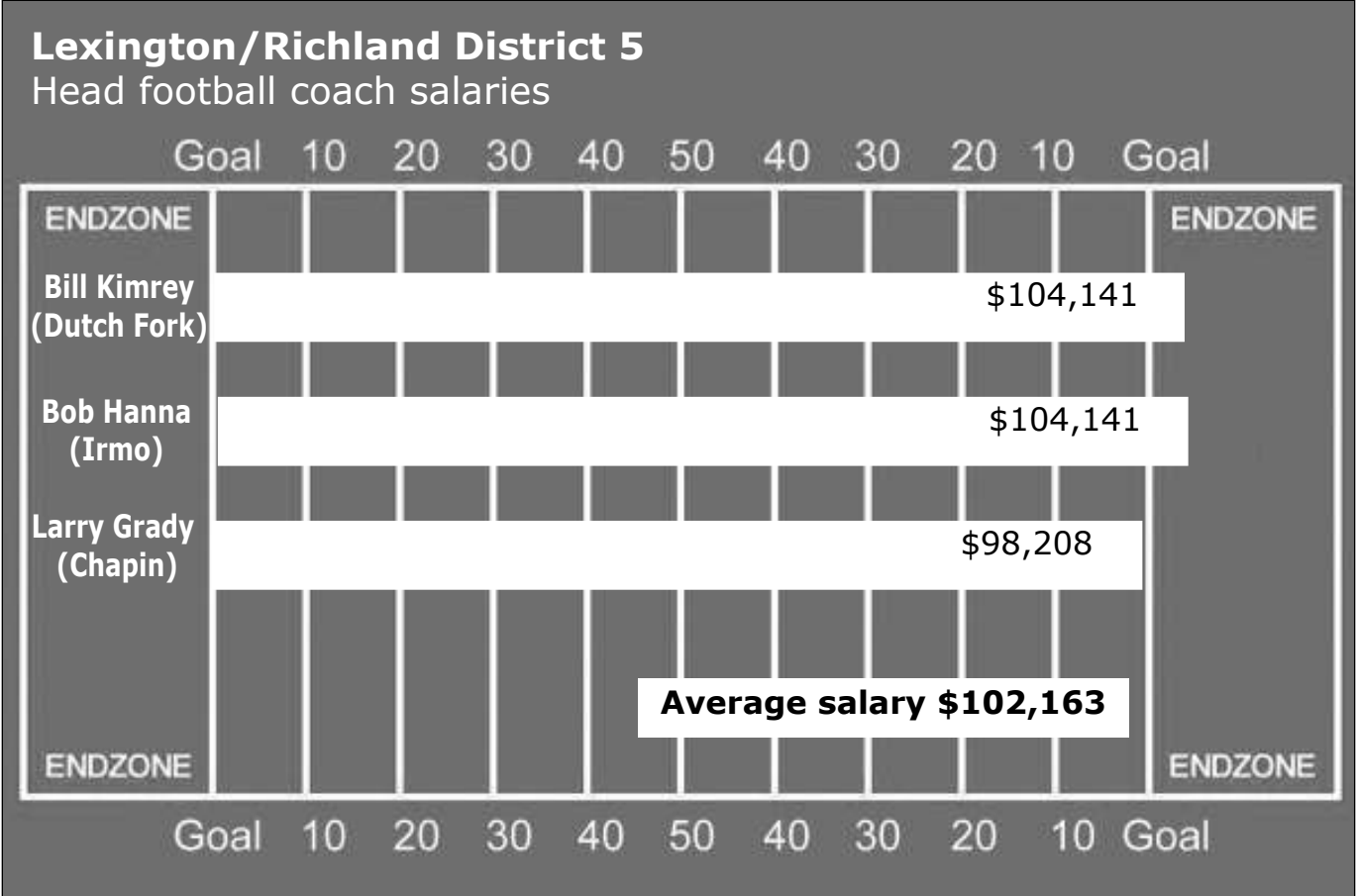
"His pay wouldn't quite have doubled but it would have been a significant jump, probably \$30,000," said Dixon on Earley's probable salary increase had he taken the Spartanburg gig.

Spartanburg demonstrates another chief difference between South and North Carolina. Broome High School (Spartanburg District Three) compensates coaches for 247 days of the year, while North Carolina counties generally pay 190 days, a pay schedule that does not compensate coaches over the summer months when school is out of session. North Carolina counties determine the amount of days they pay, so it varies slightly from district to district.

With Spartanburg schools paying more days out of the year on average, it's even more impressive that Earley turned down the Spartanburg job. Earley is currently paid a North Carolina-like salary of \$52,716. His wages are a product of being employed by a larger district, one that can't match the pay of a one-high school unit like Spartanburg School District Seven.

Streamlined districts

Streamlined districts operate with more flexibility than larger districts in South Carolina and neighboring states. One way to illustrate



S.C. coaching salaries

Some of the salaries South Carolina high school football coaches make are astronomical compared to what their North Carolina counterparts make. The top graph shows coaches' salaries from Lexington/Richland District Five, the highest paying district in South Carolina. The lower graph has the salaries for Lexington School District One, the school district where former South Brunswick head football coach Gordon Walters will coach when he takes over at White Knoll High School next fall.

that difference is to compare North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system with South Carolina's aforementioned Spartanburg School District Seven.

According to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' website, the mammoth district contains 172 schools, including 33 high schools. In contrast, Spartanburg District Seven encompasses 15 schools, including only one high school that competes in interscholastic athletics, Spartanburg High School.

Mecklenburg's colossal school system has created a bureaucratic monster with a budget of \$1.19 billion. Graduates raked in \$74 million in college scholarship money last year alone.

The smaller, less-bureaucratic school districts in South Carolina are able to avoid being bogged down in paperwork or the chain of command. South Carolina districts possess more financial flexibility, especially in paying football coaches. Spartanburg's head coach, Brown, makes \$96,000 a year full-time coaching and does not teach at the school.

He would not be paid that in Horry County, since that district/county pays according to coaching experience, a qualification apparently not included in Spartanburg Seven's salary scale, considering Brown has only been a head coach for three years.

Flat rate supplements

But in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, coaches all make the same flat rate supplement added on to their teaching salaries, as dictated by the CMS school board. Coaches in North Carolina only sign teaching contracts. So any coaching responsibilities they undertake are compensated by supplements during their sport's season. The same policy applies to a head football coach as to an assistant girls soccer coach.

Dixon explained North Carolina's salary uniformity for coaching duties.

"In North Carolina it was basically just put in as an extra duty to what you get paid for," said Dixon, "but there's some districts in South Carolina that treat it with a higher respect than they do in some North Carolina systems."

The flat rate in Mecklenburg County means a coach like Tommy Knotts from Independence High School would make the same as any first-year coach. Knotts, who led his team to six 4A and 4AA state football championships in six years and 109 straight wins in the early 2000s, certainly should be more justly compensated for his litany of headline-making accomplishments.

According to the CMS pay scale, Mecklenburg's head football coaching supplement is \$4,172, less than Brunswick County coaches draw. So Knotts would be earning between \$47,000 to \$53,000 from his 25 years of experience in the classroom. But his acumen on the football field and in helping players get recruited for college scholarships doesn't draw him any more pay than a first-year coach still wet behind his headset.

"I don't think that's necessarily fair because I think you should be compensated for your experience," said Dixon, who helped implement a plan in Gaston County that progressively compensated coaches for up to 25 years of coaching.

Lexington One School District

A paltry salary is a thing of the past for South Brunswick's soon to be former coach Walters. The University of North Carolina graduate has agreed to a contract with White Knoll High School, an institution in the Lexington One School District, but the deal has yet to be finalized by the district superintendent. Thus, the details are currently unavailable.

But Walters' predecessor Mark Cagle earned \$79,000 a year for teaching and coaching football and produced a 28-71 win-loss record in his eight seasons. Walters will also be coaching track and working as the assistant athletic director, duties that will net additional supplements in the Lexington One District.

Not only did Cagle make a nice wage for a coach, other schools in

the Lexington One School District pay their coaches substantially, too. Lexington High School coach Allen Sitterle is the athletic director as well as the school's head football man and he makes \$101,000 a year for his efforts, according to a database that the Myrtle Beach Sun-News compiled.

Dixon points out that "some of the systems also have combination football coaches and head athletic directors, and they get a pretty good paycheck because of the combination of jobs." Sitterle, who won four state championships in the 1990s at Daniel High School, is one of many football coaches/ADs in South Carolina.

Lexington One School District website lauds itself for being "a good steward of taxpayer's money." The site claims this despite Lexington One being 49th out of the state's 85 districts in expenditure per pupil, and 75th in pay for administrators.

But Lexington One is among the top in the state for compensating its football coaches. Besides Lexington and White Knoll, the other two high schools in the district are Pelion and Gilbert. There, the head coaches are each paid almost \$90,000 per year. Thus, the district, one of five in Lexington County, has an average head football coach salary of \$89,976, almost \$7,000 more than the average salary for a Lexington One school administrator.

Lexington/Richland School District Five

But Lexington One's coaching salaries pale when compared to what coaches are making in nearby Lexington/Richland District Five. That district is one of 10 in South Carolina that actually crosses county borders, something not allowed in North Carolina.

District Five is perched on Columbia's west side, and there the coaches of Dutch Fork, Irmo and Chapin high schools are making an average of \$102,163 annually. Dutch Fork's Bill Kimrey and Irmo's Bob Hanna are the two highest paid coaches in the state, with annual salaries of \$104,141.

Both are athletic directors in addition to their head coaching duties. While neither has ever won a state championship as a head coach, both have reached state finals. According to an article in Columbia's *The State* newspaper, Hanna and Kimrey's salary jump was the result of a study conducted by the district that resulted in a healthy proliferation of all teacher salaries, not just football or athletic coaches.

Compare those numbers with the average Brunswick County head football coach wage of \$51,328 (supplements included), and it's clear why a move to White Knoll would appeal to Walters. Weighing in heavily for the coach was the recent addition to his family, a recently born baby girl named Avery. She joins Chatham, a two-year-old boy just learning to speak his first words last football season.

Toss in the facts that White Knoll competes in one of the toughest football regions in the state and is an eight-year-old school with excellent facilities supported by a diehard booster club, and the decision to leave South Brunswick was made much easier for Walters.

"Our board's been good to us, and our supplements are very competitive across the state," said Pennell, South principal. "It just so happens that the state of South Carolina pays a tremendous more than we do, and I guess that's a commitment they made to do that, and that's their right to do that. I applaud them for doing that, but I'm very proud of what we've got."

Next week – Part 2

The second part of sports editor Bret McCormick's indepth report on how the difference between North Carolina and South Carolina coaching salaries continues to lure Tar Heel coaches across the border, including South Brunswick's Gordon Walters.